

HOW TO...

Improve portraits

You may not see yourself as an oil painting, but you can produce a great portrait shot from any photo. Adam Banks explains how to use Ability Office's image-editing program to give yourself a makeover

Ability Office, which we reviewed in *What's New, Shopper* November 2004, is a great value productivity suite. Unlike most such packages, it includes an image-editing program, Photopaint Studio, that's handy for business graphics tasks.

A common requirement in company reports and newsletters is for portrait photos to accompany stories written about or by staff members. These will probably be taken by someone with limited photography skills. They're also likely to feature people who aren't particularly photogenic.

No amount of tonal correction will solve these problems, so think more creatively. Applying a special effect to a portrait can mask its shortcomings and add interest. And by using the same effect each time, you can give consistency to a group of pictures, even if the originals were taken from a motley collection of company ID cards, holiday snaps and hasty Polaroids.

Ability Photopaint Studio has some capable effects filters. The problem is working out which will produce the best results and how to adjust the various settings. Below are some examples of the effects you can try with portrait photos.

If you're using Photopaint Studio for the first time, you'll find a couple of things work differently to other image editors. To zoom in and out, you press the plus and minus keys on the numeric keypad; this works regardless of whether NumLock is active. Also, the asterisk key fits the image to the screen. Otherwise, the short cuts are similar to



those in Photoshop. Filters are applied using dialog boxes in which each setting can be adjusted by dragging a slider or typing a number. It's usually better to use the sliders as there are a few teething troubles with numeric entry, including previews failing to update. The filters take longer to work than in most programs, so if nothing seems to happen after you click OK, hang on a few seconds.

When you use Save As to save your work, choose the required format from a submenu, such as File, Save As, JPEG Images, for example. To access formats that aren't mentioned in the submenu, including TIFF, choose the More option, then pick a format under Save As Type. Any options for the selected file format, such as compression, appear after you click the Save button. If you press Ctrl-S or go to File, Save you don't save the image automatically with the same settings as before but you are taken to the options for the image's current file format. The settings default to whatever you used last, even if it was for a different image, so they won't necessarily be the original settings of the current image when it was loaded. Check before pressing Enter, or you may accidentally overwrite your JPG files with a lower-quality setting. The following examples are based on the Portrait.jpg image that you can find on your cover disc.

1 The Plastifier filter under Filters, Stylize, Plastifier has two parameters: Mode and Level. The higher the Mode value, the more subtle the effect. For mugshots your best bet is the

PHOTOPAINT STUDIO AT A GLANCE

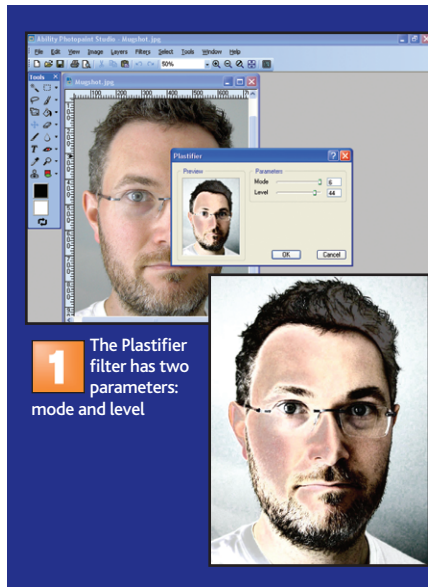
■ Ability Photopaint Studio is the image-editing program within Ability Office 4, which is available for just £45 from www.amazon.co.uk. It includes a capable word processor and spreadsheet, database, presentation, drawing and photo management applications, as well as the image editor used here.

■ Special effects filters can be used to make dull portrait photos more interesting and consistent. Aim for effects that alter the picture in an attractive way while leaving the subject clearly identifiable as there's no point using a mugshot if nobody can tell whose mug it is.

maximum, 6. To give a strong effect without destroying the picture, set the Level to between 40 and 45.

2 Many publications use stylised black-and-white drawings of their writers. You can generate these using Photopaint's B&W Noise filter under Filters, Effects, BW Noise. Set the Noise Level to around 12 per cent to keep the picture recognisable. The result is reminiscent of a 'mezzotint', one of the earliest forms of photographic reproduction. If it looks too pale and grey, give it a boost using Image, Adjust, Brightness/Contrast. Increase the contrast setting and then restore the overall light/dark balance by decreasing the brightness half as much. For example, try a Contrast level of 100 and a Brightness of -50.

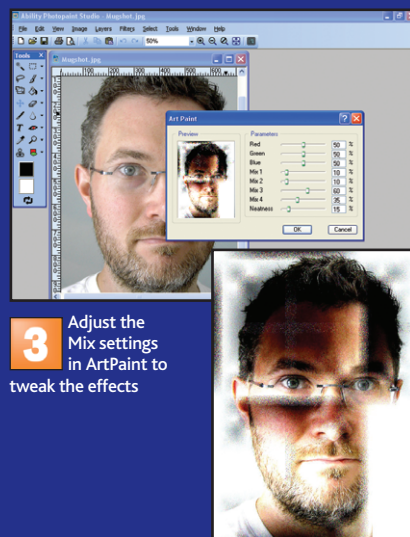
3 For something more adventurous, try the mysterious Art Paint filter under Filters, Artistic, ArtPaint. Using most settings, you'll find the picture is obliterated by tartan patterns. To avoid this, set Mix 1 and Mix 2 to equal values. Then reduce the Neatness setting to about 15 per cent. The image is broken up by large squares and crosses. Adjust Mix 3 and Mix 4 to tweak the effect. The balance of light and dark is reversed, depending on whether Mix 3 or Mix 4 has the higher value. The position of the underlying patterns can't be changed, but it works well for close-up portrait photos, as seen here. **CS**



1 The Plastifier filter has two parameters: mode and level



2 Set the Noise Level to around 12 per cent



3 Adjust the Mix settings in ArtPaint to tweak the effects